

# Eating Disorders

**Eating disorders are on the increase, especially among young people. Most are developed between the ages of 11 and 13, and unfortunately girls as young as 8 are now being diagnosed. Looking after any child, let alone a child that has come into your care is a difficult task when they are suffering from an eating disorder.**

Many children are able to hide the signs of their eating disorder very well, they may even be able to keep it from you for months, even years, which can put their health at great risk. There are many behaviours that can signal an eating disorder, such as:

- Significant weight loss or gain
- Continuous dieting or discussions of eating
- Fear of weight gain
- Continuous obsessions with food
- Continuous preoccupation with fashions, personal appearance, clothes size
- Eating while alone or in secret
- Hidden food or laxatives
- "Grazing" or eating all day whenever food is offered
- Vomiting or regularly going to the toilet after meals
- Frequently running the taps while in the toilet (to cover evidence of vomiting)
- Swollen cheeks and / or bad breath (from vomiting)
- Excessive exercising to burn calories

**There are many types of eating disorder, the most common are; Binge Eating, Compulsive Over Eating, Bulimia Nervosa and Anorexia Nervosa.**

## Binge Eating Disorder (BED)

Like bulimia, binge eating disorder has only recently been recognised as a distinct condition, it was first acknowledged as a disorder in its own right in 1992. BED shares some of the characteristics of bulimia but the essential difference is that people binge uncontrollably but do not purge. It is believed that many more people suffer from binge eating disorder than either anorexia or bulimia nervosa. Because of the amount of food eaten, many people with BED become obese, this can lead to problems with blood pressure, heart disease and a general lack of fitness.

Signs to look for:

- Eating much more rapidly than usual
- Eating until feeling uncomfortably full
- Eating large amounts of food when not physically hungry
- Eating alone because of embarrassment at the quantities of food consumed
- Feeling out of control around food
- Feeling very self conscious eating in front of others
- Feeling ashamed, depressed or guilty after bingeing
- Being unable to purge yourself or compensate for the food eaten

## Compulsive Overeating

Compulsive overeating is a variation on binge eating when people will eat at times when they are not hungry. This may happen all the time, or it may come and go in cycles. Most people who are compulsive eaters are overweight, and may use their weight or appearance as a shield they can hide behind to avoid social interaction, others hide behind a happy or jolly façade to avoid confronting their problems. Sufferers often have great shame at being unable to control the compulsion to eat. Compulsive overeating is a serious condition and needs professional support to ensure long term recovery.

